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ABSTRACT

This paper, a review of recent literature dealing with the politics of school-community relations, attempts to order and analyze the main themes, identify the participants and settings, and describe the research approaches of the literature. One school of thought views education as separate from political concerns and maintains that schools should relate to the community only on particular issues about which decisions must be made. The more prevalent viewpoint studies schools within a political context and observes processes of decisionmaking to see how schools are run. Participants in school-community relations include school boards, superintendents, influentials, and citizens. Settings have become important as researchers adopt the viewpoint that school-community relations should be examined within their societal contexts. Unfortunately, the relative newness of research in school-community relations has caused a divergence of research methods, and the consequent generalizations lack unanimity. (Author/JF)

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The Politics of School-Community Relations

Kathleen O'Brien Jackson

Research Analysis Series, Number Two

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The research analysis series, to which this paper belongs, is intended to summarize, evaluate, and analyze research findings on topics in educational management.

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1

Introduction

In recent years, the role of the school in society has been widely discussed. When, as in this paper, the focus of attention is on political aspects of school-community relations, education is placed within a political framework. In many ways, the politics of school-community relations is a relatively new field of inquiry, particularly in educational administration literature. Much of the research in the area has been done by sociologists and political scientists rather than by specialists in education. Thus many of the conceptual frameworks and methodologies developed to study community power structures have been adapted to the study of school policy in its community context.

The main concern of researchers has been the identification of the chief participants in the policy process and the roles they play in educational decisions. Attention has focused on the linkage between school administration and outside influences rather than among the internal operations of schools.

Since educational policies affect the community as well as the

school organization itself, educational policy is a matter of concern not only to professional educators, but also to the community members—the citizens who are, indeed, the foundation of the schools. Community interest in education is indicated by responses to elections, usually for candidates or finances. Citizens also become involved in specific educational issues, such as curriculum, school policy, or expenditures. Occasionally, decisions ordinarily considered routine or administrative may grow in importance to involve whole communities. How school board members, superintendents, community influentials, and citizens become involved in these educational issues and affect policy decisions is one of the central questions to which this paper is addressed.

This paper is a general review of some of the recent literature (1964-1970) dealing with relations between the school and the community—particularly the politics of the community. The paper is an attempt to order and analyze the main themes, the participants and settings, and the research approaches of the literature.

2

Research Approaches and Techniques

There are two main approaches to the study of school-community relations. One is the detailed case study of one school district or community. The other is the comparative analysis of a number of districts or communities, usually representing different characteristics, e.g., urban, rural, suburban. Although both approaches may involve an analysis over a period of time, the case study approach is usually more intensive and lengthier than the comparative approach.

Each approach has its advantages and limitations. By studying one community or school district over a number of years, a researcher can describe educational policy formulation and discern patterns of continuity or change as a result of turnover in personnel or changes in the community context. However, conclusions from such a study cannot be readily applied to other cases, because there is no standard of comparison. Whether the community studied is a deviant case or represents other locales cannot be reliably ascertained without further study.

The comparative approach offers researchers the advantage of a number of cases that can be used as standards for comparison. For example, in studying the environmental influences of community size, a researcher could compare a sample of urban communities with a sample of rural or suburban communities. However, unless the study is conducted over a considerable period of time, there is a chance it might be descriptive of a period that is atypical. The main drawback of any static research approach is that it does not allow for analysis of social processes. Most authors recognize this limitation but see enough benefits in the comparative approach to merit its consideration. The ideal research model, which many recent studies are employing, incorporates the comparative techniques with a study over a meaningful length of time.

The research technique perhaps most commonly used by students of the politics of school-community relations is the interview. In-depth, taped interviews provide most of the data used in these studies, particularly when the subjects are school board members, superintendents, or influentials. This technique allows research subjects to express their attitudes toward specific matters, and to disclose their perceptions of how, and by whom, decisions are made.

Although the interview provides information and insights that are otherwise difficult to obtain, it has the drawback of relying heavily on the skills of the interviewer. Moreover, the interpretation of results presents difficulties for systematic reporting. Generally, interviews are not conducive to the more quantitative measures used in much of the citizen opinion research. Replication of procedures is also more difficult with interviews than with more standardized measures. However, these problems may be alleviated by careful reporting of the criteria and procedures employed in arriving at conclusions.

A number of other techniques also provide useful data. One commonly used technique is participant observation. The researcher using this technique familiarizes himself with the research site so that he may develop his own impressions and conclusions from contacts with various people at the site. This technique is often supplemented by other means of data collection, including the interview.

The files of school administrators and of civic or educational

groups are other sources of information. An excellent device for measuring communications about issues, persons, and policies is systematic coverage of newspapers and other media. Statistical data based on community characteristics, finances, enrollments, or salaries are also useful. Election results are frequently analyzed as measures of public interest in education.

Ultimately, the main questions to be answered by the research will determine the techniques of data gathering to be used and the subjects to be studied.

The literature cited in this paper contains references to most of the techniques discussed above. Unfortunately, some of the studies lacked methodological sophistication in the collection and/or analysis of data. Also, in many instances the research may be difficult to replicate. Nevertheless, the literature contains much of value. It is evident that researchers writing about the politics of school-community relations are aware of the sterility of static research models and are seeking to account for change over time. Imaginative conceptual schemes have been developed, with the findings of one study often suggesting directions for further research. Those studies that build upon existing research and refine techniques of data collection and analysis hold the greatest promise for the literature in this field.

3

Schools and Community Politics: Main Themes

Most discussions of the politics of school-community relations stress the same underlying principle—schools are *public* institutions. By their nature, educational institutions are subject to the scrutiny of the public and to the same change agents that affect the larger society. It follows, then, that decisions concerning education directly involve the public and often become political issues.

Although ideologies may differ regarding the proper relationship between schools and politics, the view of the schools within a political context is a means of integrating the analysis of a variety of issues that may vary from school district to school district, from rural to urban areas, and from state to state.

A growing awareness of the political nature of educational policy making is evidenced in recent literature.

In their conceptual model of the school as a subsystem within the larger society, Campbell, Cunningham, and McPhee (1965) analyze the social matrix within which schools operate, and assert that educational policy making at all levels is immersed in politics.

Their concern is with the organization of schools and the influences and controls exercised in the making and implementing of school policy.

A comprehensive and notable treatment of the main concerns of authors writing about the politics of school-community relations is found in a work edited by Gittell and Hevesi (1969). Underlying their discussions of such topics as community power structure, education and race, education and politics, school governance and reform, and community control of schools, is the basic question of how the community relates to the schools in the shaping of educational policy.

In viewing the formulation of educational policy at the local level, many authors have used a community power-structure approach. One school of thought holds that there is an inherent conflict between the concept of community power structures and the idea of mass education.

According to Sumption and Engstrom (1966), schools are and should be committed to public service, whereas community power structures are committed to maintaining the interests of the few. These authors argue that power structures lack social responsibility because of their attempts to influence the schools for their own ends, often by secretive or devious means. Therefore, the authors warn school administrators to view power structures with suspicion, and to develop guidelines allowing schools to operate independently. Administrators are advised to identify the power structure, to remain aloof from, but informed of, its activities, and to maintain open communication with the community at large so that attempts at backroom pressure are forestalled. Responsibility for keeping the public informed, state Sumption and Engstrom, should be assumed by administrators, who are considered by the public as experts on educational policy.

This view maintains that schools are above politics and should relate to the public only on particular issues about which decisions must be made.

A less idealistic viewpoint is more prevalent among writers dealing with this topic. As Goldhammer and Pellegrin have stated: "There are many who utter pious ideals about the sanctity of education and its being above politics . . . . Education is involved in Politics. Educational decisions which impose taxes upon the community, affect living patterns of the people, pertain to the

normative structures of the community, and affect the ability of individuals to realize their aspirations through the education of their children, are certainly political decisions" (1968, p.85).

According to this view, administrators, rather than being removed from politics, play a very central role in the making of policy affecting schools—a role that happens to be distinctly political. Administrators are both sources of influence in the educational decision-making processes and targets of pressure exercised by other influentials (Gregg 1965). Furthermore, some proponents of this view see schools as political subsystems that involve a number of political actors—professional educators, community influentials, citizens, and parents (Gittell 1966, Minar 1966, Jennings 1966, Gehlen 1969, and Eye 1967). Educational policy is viewed not as something apart from other community and social concerns, but rather as subject to many of the same forces that affect public policy in other areas.

The two positions outlined above are reflected in the differing emphases placed on various aspects of educational decision making. Those who view education as apart from political concerns tend to emphasize smooth and efficient administration as the most effective means of fulfilling the school's function in society. The advocates of this view stress normative ideals and set down guidelines for how schools *should* be run.

In contrast, those who view the schools in a political context are more interested in studying the processes of decision making to see how schools actually *are* run. Researchers taking this view study in detail such elements of the decision-making process as participants, social change, and community settings. Rather than outline rules, these researchers attempt to determine the factors underlying the decision-making process. Most of the studies reviewed here reflect this latter position.

4

Schools and Community Politics: Main Actors and Settings

Discussions of the politics of school-community relations basically revolve around four main groups of actors: school boards, superintendents, influentials, and citizens (groups and individuals). Community characteristics (urban, rural, suburban, size, ethnic composition, income, etc.) and elements of social change provide the setting for educational policy.

ACTORS

SCHOOL BOARDS

School boards may be viewed as political entities, since they both influence and are influenced by the community. Board members exercise differing degrees of control over school policy, and are elected or appointed for varying terms of office, depending on the state and local contexts. The relationship between the school board and the community politics is considered mainly in terms of the selection of board members and the extent of their influence.

Minar (1966) and Masotti (1967) discuss the use of the caucus system in the selection of school board candidates. Under this system, various civic, professional, or patriotic organizations screen candidates for elective positions on the board and recommend candidates for election. Particularly in the suburban communities studied by these authors, board candidates elected under this system were representative of the interests of the higher-status groups. Minar compared communities in which the caucus system was used with those in which it was not used. He found that higher-status communities were more likely to use this method of selection than lower-status communities, and that less dissent over school policy occurred within districts using the caucus method.

Issues arising from sources other than the school have at times been reflected in school board elections, according to a study by Goldhammer and Pellegrin (1968). In such cases, board candidates may become scapegoats for issues that reflect economic or social interests rather than issues directly involving educational policy.

Reorganization of school districts often changes the composition of the electorate, and, therefore, may affect selection of school board members. Shafer's study (1968) of California school districts links control of policy making to representation of various interests on school boards. He argues that school boards reflect political alignments and considerations and that, in effect, reorganizations constitute new political units.

McCarty and Ramsey (1967) developed a typology of community power structures, school boards, and superintendent roles to study the responsiveness of educators to different kinds of power structures. Boards were classified into four categories, based on their relationship with community power structures, the distribution of their votes by members, and their relationship to the superintendent. The overall typology included the following categories:

Community Power Structure	*School Board*	*Role of Superintendent*
Dominated	Dominated	Functionary
Factional	Factional	Political Strategist
Pluralistic	Status Congruent	Professional Advisor
Inert	Sanctioning	Decision Maker

McCarty and Ramsey predicted that the types of school boards found in most communities would correspond to the types of community power structures outlined above. Communities that did not fit the model were considered transitional cases in which decision-making structures were shifting. An overall conclusion was that school boards reflect community conditions and influences; the position of the board of education in turn affects the role of the superintendent as a decision maker.

Gittell (1966) analyzed the role of the school board in the New York City school system's policy formulation. Her findings indicate that the school board removed itself from policy making and became remote from the public. Thus, rather than acting as an innovator or active participant, the school board left policy making in the hands of professional bureaucrats. This latter group, because of its expertise and the lack of public interest, was able to exert considerable power in the areas of budgeting and curriculum. However, in such areas as salary increases, selection of the superintendent, and integration policy, nonprofessionals participated to some extent in policy making.

Gittell describes three types of participation in school policy formulation: (1) closed—only the professionals in the system participate; (2) limited—the board of education and/or the mayor and specialized interest groups participate; and (3) wide—groups not wholly concerned with school policy participate.

A contrasting view of the role of the school board has been presented by other authors. Campbell and Boyd (1970) suggest guidelines for the school board to follow in assuming a role of leadership in planning public education. In their study of Jackson County, Goldhammer and Pellegrin (1968) showed that the power of the school board to appoint superintendents is linked to its ability to resolve community conflicts over school policy. Minar's study (1966) suggests a significant power potential of school boards to suppress conflict by reflecting the dominant interests of a community. Masotti's study (1967) documents the interplay among school board policy, power structures, and social, demographic, and economic changes in the community.

It is difficult to draw any meaningful generalizations about the role of the school board in the determination of educational policy. Perhaps the basic reason for this difficulty is the lack of uniformity

among school districts in the selection of board members and in the boards' functions. One valid generalization, however, is that school boards are often the focal point for influence exercised by various groups. Boards often are caught between conflicting pressures and demands and rarely are able to remain aloof from a political process involving the public, the educational bureaucracy, or influentials.

SUPERINTENDENTS

The role of the superintendent in the educational policy-making process is most often considered along with the roles of the school board and other community influentials. The actual role that any given person will play in that position varies, of course, from community to community. As Eye (1967) points out, the superintendent is subject to formal influences and controls, such as those legally and structurally defined, as well as to informal influences both inside and outside the school organization. Beyond these influences, however, the superintendent has his own beliefs and his own conception of his role as an educator.

A prominent public figure, the superintendent is often the focal point for relations between the school and the community. Goldhammer and Pellegrin's study (1968) illustrates the role of the superintendent in community conflict over education. He may hold the key to the resolution of conflict by virtue of his expert knowledge, educational resources, and ability to impose sanctions on a community. By withholding his support from either side of the controversy, the superintendent may be in a better position to promote educational policies. Gregg (1965) suggests that the superintendent's image as an expert is his greatest potential power resource, which he may use to gain public acceptance for educational programs. These studies suggest that the superintendent is able to influence the community and to have a very direct impact on policy outcomes.

McCarty (1966) describes the role of the superintendent in a more formal sense as involving long-range planning for education to determine the overall boundaries within which school personnel operate. Curriculum planning, recruiting criteria, and personnel considerations fall within the domain of the superintendent's authority. McCarty argues that decisions regarding these matters

will vary according to the way the superintendent influences or is influenced by the community.

Reorganization of school districts may have important consequences for the role of the superintendent. Shafer (1968) suggests that the selection of a superintendent in a district undergoing reorganization, whether he is chosen from inside or outside the district, reflects the changing power composition of the board. In Shafer's view, the superintendent is the key indicator of shifts in the composition of the board that may have occurred as a result of the reorganization. Turnover of superintendents may well be a way of gauging community influence on schools.

The McCarty and Ramsey study (1967), based on the typology of community power structures, school boards, and superintendent roles described earlier in this chapter, examined the relationships among these units. McCarty and Ramsey found that the role of the superintendent varies according to particular types of power structures and school boards.

A model developed by the two authors depicts a range of roles for the superintendent. At one extreme is the "functionary" role in which the superintendent identifies with the dominant community interests and takes cues from them. In this role, the superintendent carries out policy rather than develops or innovates policy.

At the other extreme, the superintendent is the decision maker. In this case, the community power structure is virtually inert or unidentifiable and the school board merely a "rubber stamp" for the decisions of the superintendent.

In the divided or factional community and school board situation, the superintendent assumes the role of political strategist and does not become involved with any distinct faction.

In the community characterized by the pluralistic power structure and status congruent board, the superintendent takes on the role of professional advisor.

The authors predict that community conflict may result when the superintendent does not fit the role expectations of the community and the school board.

In a study following up these findings, Hickox (1967) found that, in communities in transition from one type of power structure or school board to another, the superintendent will more

likely reflect the makeup of the board than of the community. In summary, both Hickox's and McCarty and Ramsey's studies indicate that the superintendent's role, rather than being one of strong leadership, seems to reflect community and school board interests.

Of particular significance are the superintendent's relations with the school board. One author, Hodgson (1968), maintains that the first and most important task of any superintendent of schools is to gain and keep the confidence of his school board. Pellegrin's study (1965) of educational innovation supports the view that, to be a successful innovator of school policy, a superintendent must have the support of the school board. Since school boards in turn depend to a large extent on community support, superintendents become embroiled, directly or indirectly, in the politics of educational policy.

INFLUENTIALS

Identification of influentials within a community has long been a conceptual and methodological problem for students of community power structures. Most recent studies of community power structures have attempted to go beyond the formal institutional organization of a community—in which elected officials or government bureaucrats are the main focus of attention—to ascertain informal bases of influence.

Three main schools of thought concerning the study of community power structures have developed over the years: the reputational school, the pluralist school, and the comparative decision-making approach.

In brief, the reputational school assumes that a structured set of influentials with overlapping interests make most community decisions. These influentials generally belong to the elite of the community in terms of class, money, or prestige. They are identified on the basis of reputed influence by informants drawn from centers of communication and organizational life in the community.

The pluralist school contends that, instead of a monolithic elite power structure as suggested by the reputationalists, there are multiple centers of power. The pluralists usually begin their studies by identifying first the key issues and then the individuals who

become involved in decision making regarding those issues. Thus, influentials may vary from issue to issue.

Both the reputational and the pluralist schools have been criticized for shortcomings and oversights in their analyses. In recent years, a broader comparative approach, combining elements from both schools, has emerged. This approach attempts to consider a range of issues and participants more inclusive than those ordinarily studied by the pluralists. The comparative approach takes into account routine decisions made according to organizational procedures as well as more controversial public decisions. Moreover, it has been applied to multicommunity analysis as opposed to single case studies, in an attempt to discover underlying decision-making processes and to account for change over time. A prominent study by Agger, Goldrich, and Swanson (1964) perhaps best illustrates this approach.

A complete discussion of all three approaches, as well as of some problems and analysis techniques, is found in Cahill and Hencley's *The Politics of Education in the Local Community* (1964), and in the work edited by Gittell and Hevesi (1969).

The literature on community power has generally been unconcerned with educational policy. However, most scholars who study the schools' relationship to local power structures refer to one or a combination of the models outlined above. McCarty and Ramsey, in developing their typology, used the reputational technique of identifying power structures, but attempted to identify more than just the elites. Goldhammer and Pellegrin assert that most educational issues involving community influentials are tied in closely to other social or economic conditions. According to these two authors, influentials are more concerned with their social and economic positions than with education and, therefore, tend to remain aloof from policy making except in unusual circumstances.

Campbell, Cunningham, and McPhee (1965) place the power structure within the broader perspective of a whole matrix of social and economic conditions. Accordingly, they point to significant interrelationships among educational issues and other community issues. Since education is interwoven with society as a whole, they feel that it would be unrealistic to study educational issues as if they were isolated. The authors also recommend that consideration be given to the formal, legal controls exercised over

schools by federal, state, and local authorities as well as to their internal organization.

Similarly, Gregg (1965) maintains that the politics of the schools are related to the politics of other public agencies within the school district. In many cases, he points out, schools must compete with other agencies for the same resources—usually taxes—to finance their programs. In this perspective, there is no simple linkage between influentials and educational policy without taking into consideration the larger milieu.

A framework developed by Carver and Growe (1969) for the study of community power may be useful to administrators. The authors incorporate important variables in the community decision-making process with a review of relevant literature.

CITIZENS

Because schools are public institutions that deal with some of the most fundamental values of society, obviously the public must play a key role in the educational system. As individuals, parents, and groups, citizens are involved in many issues directly affecting schools.

Perhaps the most commonly used indicator of citizen interest in education is school elections, which may involve school board candidates, bonds, or referenda on particular issues. The significance of the vote is illustrated in many communities experiencing the so-called taxpayers' revolt, which limits funds available to finance educational programs.

Goldhammer and Pellegrin's study (1968) of public responses to educational issues in three election years showed marked differences in turnout. As the authors point out, most citizens do not become vitally concerned with educational policy unless educational issues are tied to larger community issues, for example, land use, taxation, or zoning.

To study the relationships among community conflict, decision making, and school policy, Minar (1966) developed support and dissent indices based on school board election and referenda data. His findings indicate a positive relationship between election turnout and dissent.

Parents are the group of citizens perhaps most highly concerned with school policy. Jennings (1966) sees parents as having a dual

role regarding the schools: They are producers of support for the outcomes of the schools, and they are consumers of the outcomes of the schools. According to Jennings, expressions of parental dissatisfaction or grievances directed against the schools are significant factors in producing changes within the system as well as a means of understanding the political relationship of parents to schools. The type of grievance, the mode of expression, and the means of communication were the main focuses of his study. His findings show that the expression of parental grievances varies according to (1) the type of grievance (course content or events), (2) the social class of the parent expressing the grievance, and (3) the parent's degree of activism within the community or school. In general, Jennings' study indicates that the parent's involvement in community affairs and in school affairs tends to be related to his expression of grievances.

Corwin's study (1965) also indicates that parents, individually or collectively in the PTA, exert more pressure on superintendents and school board members than do other groups in the community. Most demands are related to curriculum, selection of textbooks, and views of teachers.

Participation of citizens in various types of advisory or civic groups is another important source of influence in school-community relations. An example of such citizen activity is the caucus system for nominating school board candidates initiated by influential groups. Minar (1966) views these caucuses as conflict management devices to circumvent controversial issues through careful selection of candidates representing the main community interests. In this sense, advisory or civic groups may be seen as broadening public participation in educational policy.

However, as Campbell, Cunningham, and McPhee (1965) point out, participation may be limited to those members of the public who are sympathetic to the school board or the school administrator. Moreover, not all segments of the public may be invited to join, as in a community ruled by a consensual elite, thus placing outside groups or minorities at a disadvantage. These authors recommend heterogeneity in educational decision making—the expression of various points of view through representation of all groups within the community rather than a select few.

Corwin (1965) discusses pressure groups that actively seek to

advance various community interests. He shows that the presence of these groups in a community affects the formulation of educational policy. Resources and strategies used by various groups in the community in affecting educational policy are considered by Crain and by Gittell and Hevesi.

Interest groups and school-oriented groups are also discussed in some detail by Campbell, Cunningham, and McPhee (1965) and by Gittell (1966). Groups may either support or oppose the schools' policies or programs, and may either raise healthy criticism or seek to stymie the goals of educators. Sumption and Engstrom (1966) point out that groups may act as mediators of communication from community to school and vice versa.

Two issues important to both citizen groups and individuals in recent years are school integration and school reform. These two matters, often related to each other, have frequently been the source of community conflict. Crain (1968) has studied the public reaction to decisions by school boards in seven southern cities and eight northern cities to desegregate schools. Gittell and Hevesi (1969) provide general background and analysis of some of the main issues in urban school integration. Hall (1970) compiled a comprehensive bibliography on the implementation of school desegregation.

Citizens may interact directly with teachers, superintendents, school board members, or with other citizens as a means of affecting educational policy. Although some studies have indicated a certain degree of apathy among many citizens regarding educational matters, the potential for involvement is of greatest significance to those concerned with the politics of school-community relations.

Settings

The politics of school-community relations is a process that varies with time and particular contexts. The social, economic, and demographic composition of a community is often significant in the determination of educational policy. Communities are also part of a larger political system involving state and national governments. Although the effects of change are most evident within the community, the impetus for change frequently comes from outside the immediate community.

The relationship of the school to the community has been studied in urban, suburban, and rural communities.

Masotti (1967), reporting on his study of a suburban school district in the Chicago metropolitan area, outlines the consequences for education that changes in social, demographic, and economic conditions may produce.

Another perspective on the demographic structure is provided by Gehlen (1969). His study of small-town and rural schools shows that the acceptance of educational innovation may be more likely in a heterogeneous environment than a more homogeneous one.

McCarty and Ramsey's study (1968) illustrates the utility, for the study of educational policy, of comparing the different environments that accompany rural, suburban, and urban communities.

Some of the problems described by Gittell (1966) and by Gittell and Hevesi (1969) may be considered unique to urban systems, because of their size and heterogeneity. Gittell suggests that the size of a city is an important determinant of the degree to which internal bureaucratic control takes over and reduces the influence of elected officials or the public. She argues that in smaller communities it is possible for political notables to become more involved in educational policy because they have fewer competing interests demanding their attention. The growth of bureaucratic control in large cities has caused many people to counter with demands for community control of schools, with policy making broken down into more manageable units.

Minar, in his study (1966) of community dissent and participation in school politics, discusses the significance of status levels of communities. His study suggests that the higher the overall socioeconomic status of a community's members, the better the community is able to deal with conflict.

The Goldhammer and Pellegrin study (1968) indicates that, in a community with a heterogeneous population, competing value structures are likely to exist, thus increasing the likelihood of community conflict.

Urban systems face many problems as a result of population growth and redistribution. Two important problems are school finance and racial imbalance, caused largely by the exit of the middle class to the suburbs. The consequent shrinkage of the tax base results in a poorer quality of education in the inner cities

and greater strains on the budget (Smith 1968).

Another dimension in the interrelationship between the community and the educational system is time. The studies by Minar, Gittell, Goldhammer and Pellegrin, Crain, McCarty and Ramsey, and Hickox amply illustrate the changes that occur in educational policy over time. The process by which a community conflict arises and is resolved may span a number of years during which issues, school personnel, and community actors change.

5

Summary

The study of the politics of school-community relations requires that schools be viewed in their societal context. Schools are not separate from society. Indeed, each interacts with the other in such a way that at the local level the schools not only reflect the structure and characteristics of the community, but also influence the community.

It is the interactions between educators and the noneducational public, over specific educational issues, that provide the dynamics of school-community relations. Since these interactions result in public decisions on educational issues, the interactions constitute a political process.

The dynamic nature of school-community relations, and the variety and complexity of participants and settings, make the subject difficult and elusive to study.

Nevertheless, the literature cited in this paper indicates that researchers have made some progress toward identifying and making valid generalizations about (1) the main participants in

the policy-making process, (2) the influence these participants have on the process, and (3) the effects the community and school settings have on the process.

Not surprisingly, given the relatively recent adoption of the viewpoint that school-community relations should be examined in their societal context, and given the divergent methods, techniques, and academic backgrounds (biases?) of researchers in the area, these generalizations lack unanimity. Fortunately, they serve a heuristic function for future research, and provide the basis for building theory that can be used to explain patterns of interaction and influence between communities and their schools.

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